

drains in the Thibodaux-Houma area. While conducting their storm drain marking projects, volunteers also hand out a fact sheet on storm drains and nonpoint source pollution. This activity is a real eye-opener for both children and adults as they also survey and record the trash they observe around storm drains.

Fish and Wildlife

The Barataria-Terrebonne estuary is habitat and feeding ground for an abundance of living creatures – fish, shellfish, and other wildlife. Over 600 species of vertebrates are known to live within the estuary; it is also home for more than ten species listed as threatened or endangered. One of the seven Priority Problems affecting the Barataria-Terrebonne estuary involves a decline in living resource populations. This decline is linked to both wetland loss and water quality degradation in the estuary. The Barataria-Terrebonne Partnership has attempted to address adverse changes in living resources – both a decline of native species and introductions of damaging non-native species such as nutria and hydrilla.

One of the major success stories for the estuary is the return of the brown pelican, which had virtually disappeared from Louisiana by 1963 because of pesticide poisoning. Efforts by a BTNEP partner, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, have successfully reestablished a thriving population of these birds.

One of the Estuary Program Action Plans calls for the Barataria-Terrebonne Partnership to protect habitat for migratory and resident birds, and specifically mentions the purchase of an area known as the Grand Isle Woods. This patch of live oaks in the town of Grand Isle, the only populated barrier island in Louisiana, is recognized by national birding interests as a premier area in which to view neotropical migrant birds. Louisiana's coastal wetlands and barrier islands are the first land masses encountered by these birds following their migration from South and Central America across the Gulf of Mexico, and are thus vitally important habitat for these weary travelers. After a 10-year effort by the Orleans Audubon Society to create a bird sanctuary on Grand Isle, the Nature Conservancy of Louisiana has purchased land now known as the Lafitte's Woods Preserve. BTNEP has worked with The Nature Conservancy and local birding groups to enhance habitat on Grand Isle, and to produce an annual celebration called "Migratory Bird Celebration Day". BTNEP has produced a large, beautiful double-sided poster which demonstrates the importance of Barataria-Terrebonne's varied habitats to both migrant and resident birds. An accompanying video is also in the works. These tools and events are critical for informing and inspiring local people about the ecological value of the habitat in which they reside, as well as the tremendous economic potential from eco-tourism by international bird watchers. They are also instrumental in informing the nation of the ecological adventures that await them on their visit to Barataria-Terrebonne.

Citizen Involvement and Education Programs

The Estuary Program has produced and is producing many educational products, including an award-winning documentary by local filmmaker Glen Pitre entitled "Haunted Waters, Fragile Lands." Relying heavily on historical footage, Mr. Pitre relates the story of how this land was sacrificed, through clear-cutting of our vast stands of enormous virgin bald cypress trees, to the excavation of major navigation channels and the leveeing of the Mississippi River to feed the "American Dream". This video was followed by a sequel, "Rescuing the Treasure," also by Mr. Pitre, which outlines some of Louisiana's restoration efforts. Contrasting these early productions with the Program's most recent video, "America's Vanishing Treasure," by Craig Gautreaux, one can see the evolution of our response to the dilemma of land loss. What began as a characterization and analysis of the problem has given way to a much more serious tone. "America's Vanishing Treasure" is a grave warning that without the help of the nation, the marshes, the swamps, the habitat, the seafood, and the rich culture of this estuary will disappear into the Gulf of Mexico. It is a warning that this treasure, which we call Barataria-Terrebonne, could be lost forever.

Recognizing the critical value of both formal classroom education, and education for the general public, the Program office funds a number of education and outreach projects. These include educator workshops such as WETMAAP (Wetlands Education Using Maps and Aerial Photography), a program originating from Chadron State College in Nebraska. Through this workshop, teachers learn a variety of map-reading skills, including interpretation of topographic maps, infrared vegetation signatures, and physical structures. Participants are also afforded an opportunity for intensive analysis of a specific site, through aerial photographs from three different time periods. The site that was chosen to

focus on is Golden Meadow, so named for the once ubiquitous goldenrod flower. Golden Meadow is located just inside the end of the southern-most hurricane protection levee on Bayou Lafourche, the town where many of the survivors of the hurricane of 1893 settled after the devastation of their Cheniere Caminada community. Teachers are encouraged to study and interpret the changes observed between 1956 and the present. What they observe is that what was once a continuous carpet of marsh between Golden Meadow and the Gulf has now been reduced to a vestige of the former cover, with gaping holes of open water resembling a skeletonized leaf. The changes are striking and they sound a warning alarm to the residents of this community that they are increasingly more vulnerable to hurricane storm surges and threats to drinking water supplies.

Each fall the BTNEP Program Office hosts an ecology festival known as La Fete d'Ecologie. La Fete is not only an opportunity to educate our citizenry about our issues, through information booths from natural resource agencies, community groups, and individuals, but a celebration of our unique heritage as well. The sounds of Cajun and swamp pop music and the smell of jambalaya and étouffée infuse the air, as children dressed as estuarine animals throw beads while they parade through the festivities. Traditional dancers from Native American, Cajun, Italian, Islenos, Philippine, African, Croatian, and Irish backgrounds remind us of the rich blend of ethnicities that have formed the gumbo of our culture. Demonstrations take place of palmetto hut building, cypress baskets, blow guns, traditional boat building, and "Dancing the Shrimp" -- a reenactment of the art of dancing away the hulls from shrimp dried on large platforms in the sun before the days of refrigeration. These activities remind us that we are a people who have historically made a living by being entirely dependent on this estuarine environment. Decoy carving, cast net throwing, and duck calling contests remind us that we still are.

The BTNEP has provided funding and other assistance to a number of projects, which serve to educate the public about coastal issues, through "hands-on" education. These projects include two annual Coastal Wetland Workshops produced by the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service series of five Marsh Maneuvers Camps, and a series of Bayou Camps, produced by the Bayou Camp Foundation. These workshops and camps allow participants to interact with the estuary environment, an experience that leaves them enriched and open to learning more about this fragile land. They become sensitized to the fragile beauty and importance of the coastal environment. They begin to recognize what Louisiana and the nation stands to lose as this great gift we have been given disappears.

Other outstanding efforts include those of Americorps on the Bayou, a service group under Les Reflections du Bayou that is dedicated to preserving and beautifying South Louisiana, and teaching others about the pressing issues. Working closely with BTNEP, the DEQ Nonpoint Source Program, and the other federal and state agencies, this group has planted thousands of plants for coastal restoration on barrier islands and bayou borders. They have also given hundreds of presentations to schools and other groups on land loss and nonpoint source pollution issues, and assisted with several storm drain marking projects. This group, and others like it, epitomize the level of action that is necessary by all the stakeholders of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary if this "Good Earth" is to be saved.

For more information, visit the BTNEP website at www.btnep.org or contact the Program Office at 1-800-259-0869. 

